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**Professor Charles du Vé Florey in interview with Dr Max Blythe
Edinburgh, 17 February 1998**

MB Professor Charles Florey, we are in the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh building, one of the Adam rooms here. This is quite near to where you are nowadays at Dundee. Perhaps you could tell me about how your career evolved because you have had a long career in medicine, not in the same direction as your father, Lord Howard Florey, the penicillin pioneer, but perhaps you could tell me a little bit about your life and how that career developed.

CF Certainly. I had a medical education. I did follow it with clinical practice, but my father encouraged me to do medicine. In fact I wanted to become an engineer. I was fascinated by cars when I was young but it was obvious I was no mathematician. So my father in his great wisdom advised me to do medicine where mathematics weren't necessary. I completed the course and remember the moment when I actually chose the direction I have followed up to now. I was being interviewed for a house job and was asked what I wanted to do. I said, 'I don't really know. Public health!' And the consultant who was interviewing me said, 'Do you mean WHO?' 'Yes, yes, that's what I mean,' I said and promptly went off to read a Pelican book about WHO. I later decided that that was not what I meant, but it started me thinking of public health as a career. I was helped to go to the United States where my real career started after I had qualified.

MB And this was to be along the avenue of epidemiological research?

CF Yes. I spent four months in New York City where I learnt something about the health services there, and then went to the Yale School of Epidemiology and Public Health where I stayed for another nine years.

MB You didn't come away, you were totally caught up at Yale?

CF Yes. I enjoyed the Master of Public Health course and I realised - one of the few times my father was wrong - that there is quite a lot of mathematics in medicine.

MB Yes. Just taking up that point. Your father had felt that that decision on public health, which became epidemiology, wasn't really very profoundly into medical science, just a shunt-yard for inadequate research?

CF Well, I don't think he saw it as research but he had a number of friends in the United States who were involved with it, one in particular was Leona Baumgartner who was the Health Commissioner of New York City. She said, 'If you send him over, I will see that he gets into some aspect of public health.' But I think my roots, because of the family, were basically in research and, once I'd been to Yale for the public health course, I stayed on.

MB So that was a profound impact, even though it wasn't father's line, that he made on that career?

CF Yes. Some of it was behind the scenes because I had no idea that he had prepared the way for me to go to the States.

MB But he was very considerate in that way?

CF Yes, and he wanted me to prosper, whatever it was. It was in fact a good set of circumstances, because I've never regretted getting into epidemiology.

MB Just getting to the family that you were born into Charles, because I'm obviously fascinated by the Florey family as the work of your father had such a profound effect and your mother was such a fascinating lady. That family had Australian roots and perhaps we could just talk about how much you were aware of that in growing up. Was there a strong Australian flavour in the background to your life?

CF Not really. I think my father's accent usually provoked in others 'Oh, he's an Australian,' but I could never hear it. I can now, when I listen to the recordings we have of him, but I was never aware of the Australianess of the family. I think my mother didn't have an accent; certainly I wasn't aware of it. So essentially we were not an Australian family, but outsiders clearly realised that at least my father and mother were.

MB So you just grew up in the family without recognising Australian roots although very early on in your life you did go to Australia.

CF That's right. We went there when I was eighteen months of age and I have just one memory of it. It was just outside Colombo. Our liner had stopped and I looked over the rail down to a lifeboat below. Both my parents were in it, going off to see Colombo, and I was left behind. I thought that was so sad, but I don't think it affected me greatly as I remember nothing more.

MB One of your earliest recollections and a strong one. On that visit, you were actually to meet grandparents and I think you've got a rather exciting family picture, Charles, of the family all together there, with your father's mother.

CF I came across this photo by chance the other night. It has my grandmother, my father and my mother and my sister sitting on Dad's lap and myself sitting on my mother's lap. This is Hilda, my father's half-sister, who also did medicine. It is rather a nice family photograph spanning the generations.

MB And in the course of discussing that, we have come across an early memory. You didn't have many early memories of father before you went at the age of five to the USA?

CF No, that's correct. He was not, as I recall, at home a great deal but I suppose my memory really of home started at about the age of four.

MB So, you related to mother at that time, strongly?

CF Yes.

MB Do you want to say anything about her at this stage or do you want to wait until we come back from the American years?

CF I think I appreciated her much more when we came back from the States.

MB So let's take that American journey in first. Was that a shock to you? It was to your sister but I am just wondering how much of it was a shock to a five year old, and how you adapted to being sent away in wartime.

CF I had just started going to school in Oxford and hadn't been there even a term, but there was whispering going on in the house. 'Don't tell anybody', but I didn't know what we weren't to tell anybody. I had in the back of my mind we were to go to the States and then, one morning, we went. We didn't go with our parents. We went with a lady called Mrs Duthie¹ and her daughter and that was it, I just accepted it. It was a very interesting trip on board a boat; it was a new experience. There was an attempt to sink us but it was unsuccessful.

MB So you get there and you stay with a family that have links with home and with parents?

CF Yes, we stayed with the Fultons for five years. He was a Rhodes scholar at the same time as my father, so they were quite close.

MB So you were well settled as far as you found it for five years and saw father occasionally on his trips to America?

CF Yes. I think as far as living there was concerned, there were only occasional times of feeling it would be nice to be back in Oxford. The Fultons were a very wealthy family and the room that I had in the house was covered with Ackermann prints of Oxford. I used to look at them and think yes, that's my home. But it was nice to see my father when he came over because he was actually relaxed when he came to the house.

MB Did he just used to call in?

CF Well, we knew he was coming.

MB You'd get warnings?

CF A slight warning. There wouldn't be too much warning because it was wartime and one never knew when the plane would arrive. But, yes, I suppose he dropped in four or five times during that time.

¹ Not Mrs Frankland as stated in the videotaped interview.

MB How do you summarise that American period? It must be quite difficult looking back. I suppose it just went rather quickly as a child at that time, and just all of a sudden the war was over.

CF I suppose it went quickly but it was very influential on my future because I went back and I returned to New Haven.

MB Was that a call? Did you feel a call back there?

CF Not really. I had the opportunity of either going to Harvard or to Yale, and Yale had more advantages because I knew people there.

MB It had the vote. When you got back to England, let's talk about that particular period because you were able to re-discover a family that, for a time, had been rather distant with occasional glimpses of father. Those must have been the golden years before going away again to school at Rugby.

CF Yes. I remember arriving at Oxford Station coming from Liverpool². We were with my father because he had come across with us. My mother was on the station - it was a wonderful moment to see her. But the thing that went through my mind, like any child, was 'Oh my Goodness, we'll have no more ice-cream.' And that was the difference for me between the United States and Britain at that time.

MB So your father travelled back with you? He'd been in the States and he came back with you?

CF Yes.

MB What kind of a family did you find? It was still very much a happy family at that stage, although things were to get more strained later.

CF Yes. There was a lot of fun. The things that I remember mostly were around mealtimes because that was when we were altogether. We used to play games at mealtimes. One particular game I remember is called Geography, where you name a place and you take the last letter of that place and the next person has to give the place name beginning with that letter. And we had all sorts of tricks to make it difficult for somebody, like words ending in 'X'. He drove those games along because he knew more places than we did through his travels. But there were other games we played and that was good. And it wasn't just him, it was the whole family that took part.

MB Yes, it was togetherness. At that time, it was very together. What do you remember of your mother during that period? We've talked rather a lot about father.

CF I think of nothing but nice words because she was a very loving mother and she spent a lot of time with us. I think she compensated for the absence of my father, in fact. I remember we went for our first long bicycle trip to North Wales and she cycled with us. It was just lovely that she should be there and to have her look after

² Not Southampton, which is stated as a possibility in the videotaped interview.

us. Actually, we were stronger than she was at the time, so we could have cycled further but it was good to have her there.

MB But that was a pretty substantial trip you made, a big adventure.

CF Yes, it was a three day cycle. We did take the train a little part of the way.

MB Where did you go to school in Oxford in that interim period?

CF I went to The Dragon.

MB Was that a good experience?

CF There were good things and bad things. I think it was a good preparation for life and that sort of thing. The worst part of it was having to do classics, doing Latin and Greek, because I had had none of that in the States. I don't regret it, particularly the Latin, because I can now impress members of my department with my knowledge of Latin and the origin of words, which they don't have.

MB Just keeping to the family warmth and the humour that we've put on record - I've got a feel for lunchtimes or suppertimes. Howard Florey, your father, is often regarded as a rather stern figure, driving areas of research by getting grants and moving people in in a fairly forceful way, but you've said that he was a man of considerable humour on the home front. Perhaps we could just talk about that humour and the form it took.

CF He loved to joke and so did my mother. That's why they got on so well at that time. He would play with words and he would describe situations that were very serious but with a humorous side to them. As a conversationalist he was very good, but when it came to the emotional side one didn't actually see him withdrawing, he never took part. I can tell you a story about his behaviour towards me as an infant. I was not very healthy when I was born and tended to throw up a lot. He picked me up and he foolishly put me over his shoulder where I promptly vomited down his back. He didn't think much of that, so he never picked me up again. Now, I wasn't aware of that, but people have told me. It was just part of life that he didn't pick me up.

MB A very practical man!

CF Very! I might have done the same!

MB You talked about them being very happy in those years. I think you've brought some of the photographs in, Charles, that show quite a lot of the warmth of those days.

CF Yes, I think this particular picture, where they are sitting together in a glass-house attached to our home in Parks Road. They were very happy at that time. That was the jovial period. I'm not quite sure when that was taken.

MB I think we've also got a picture here of their wedding day.

CF That's the wedding day, yes. He didn't wear tails as you can see because he was going to go off after the wedding to do something else, and unfortunately - I learned this from Lennard Bickel³ - they didn't have a honeymoon at that time. He was too busy.

MB He was ready to move on there. So a quick wedding and on.

CF Yes. Whenever you take the train from Oxford to Paddington you can see the spire of the church where they were married.

MB If we take you as far as going up to Rugby, was that a great wrench to go away again after just two or three years back?

CF No, I think I was quite used to it.

MB You were ready for it by then?

CF Well, it wasn't a matter of being ready. Each new place was a place to be. There was an attempt to make me a boarder in the last term at The Dragon to ease me into being at boarding school, but I don't think it made the slightest difference. It was not difficult to do.

MB Those years at Rugby, did they cut you off a bit from the family? You continued with the family holidays, didn't you?

CF No, half the year was spent with the family one way or another. Yes, we continued to have family holidays.

MB What kind of a father did he turn out to be in those years? Was he advisory, did he take you on one side, was he interested in the schoolwork? He was meticulous in planning all kinds of things. Did he plan for you?

CF Well, he planned for me to go to Rugby. He watched my school reports.

MB Why did he choose Rugby?

CF Because the headmaster of The Dragon had been to Rugby. They'd discussed it and he thought it was a good idea.

MB So you were dispatched.

CF Exactly. I don't think he had any particular reason apart from that.

MB But when you got there, he was keen on your progress?

CF It's hard to say.

³ Bickel, L., 1972. *Rise up to life; a biography of Howard Walter Florey who gave penicillin to the world*. London: Angus and Robertson.

MB I just wondered how much you talked with him about how things were going?

CF Not very much really. If I talked to anybody, it was to my mother.

MB She was the close one?

CF Yes.

MB So, in those years, you've only got a fog of remembering him on holidays, nothing very special?

CF No. But the holidays were good fun.

MB More games?

CF Well, doing things together. One aspect of him was that he really didn't like children very much. He didn't hate them, but he wasn't interested in them. I think that was the case for both my sister and myself. Until we got to the point where we could discuss things with him, it was a light contact, but as soon as we knew something and we had some background, then he talked in greater depth with us.

MB He resonated with that?

CF Yes. And certainly by the time I was an adult it was quite different.

MB What kind of support did you find? We've talked about the early days of discussing a medical career with him, him opening up ideas and thoughts of where it might go. Did he follow that career as well? Was he supportive?

CF Yes. To be quite honest, I really didn't enjoy doing medicine. I didn't wish to be a clinician and he buoyed me up by saying 'Nor did I. I wanted to do research, but it's the route to where you want to get.'

MB That must have been very important support?

CF Yes.

MB To know that he had had to go that route.

CF Yes, but I think more important was what he said about the huge number of opportunities you get from studying medicine which you don't get if you study many other subjects. So that was supportive. He didn't mind that I decided not to be a clinician. He was concerned about what I was going to take up, and we've been through about how I came across public health by default. He had assisted in that in various ways. I don't think he really approved of epidemiology. I was called Bertie in the family and he used to say, 'If Bertie wants to do it, all right, it's better than nothing.' He came round eventually. As he got older, he became more and more concerned about the increasing world population and latterly involved with family planning. He inevitably began to appreciate not only the scientific rigour of looking

down an electron microscope, but the issues of probability which the epidemiologist has to deal with.

MB So you think in those later years that he actually came close to appreciating why you'd gone down that avenue a bit?

CF Yes. There was never any rancour about that. We got on well. He was interested in cardiovascular disease, as you know, and certain diseases of the main arteries, and I was interested in their epidemiology. I remember one conversation which was very productive. He gave me ideas, and I was able to give him ideas I'm glad to say, because he hadn't thought of things from an epidemiological angle.

MB Just keeping with the cardiovascular theme, he had angina for quite a time?

CF Yes.

MB Was that a well-kept secret?

CF I don't know if it was a well-kept secret. He did his best not to tell anybody. He didn't tell me, but I've been told he had it around about the age of fifty-six. He continued to walk across to the lab in order to keep his exercise going. He felt that if anybody knew, it might affect the way they reacted to him, that they might see him as past it. So he told no one. It wasn't really a great surprise that he died of a heart attack, though.

MB Charles, opening up the story now, you've got us to a point where you say, at a particular age, you began to access this man. What are your recollections of those years, if you could encapsulate them? I am trying to think of the portrait we are creating of this man, which has already been quite substantial: a man of curious contrasts in a way; great humour but in a way great capacity for withdrawal and for being away from family, for being very private. What are the abiding memories for you of those later years as an adult speaking to him and meeting him on more even terms?

CF They were very occasional because I wasn't in Oxford. Really, essentially when I went off to school, it became less and less. So by the time I went to medical school I really wasn't in Oxford at all. I went off to the States immediately after I qualified. They were special occasions when I met him. We would spend time together and we would talk about various issues. We talked about family life because by that time things were not going particularly well.

MB Was that a great sadness to you? You've drawn that in, the family beginning to feel a little bit split. Was that a great sadness to you, I mean from a family you had known in the post-America years that was quite comfortable, or were you too far away by then?

CF I was far enough away for it not to matter dramatically. It was a sadness because how different it would have been if it had been happy all the way through.

MB And you were too close to mother for it not to really be too far away?

CF Yes. I think maybe it's just boys, but I tended to take my mother's side because I knew more about her and what she was suffering. In later years I understood what my father went through as well, so I blame them both basically; they each egged the other on. I think he was very involved with his work. He really was a workaholic, and he continued to do that right up until he died. I think it's hard to have a real family life if you are as involved as he was. And of course he had the whole of the wartime when we weren't there, which may have set the tone for not being very involved with family. I remember him with some warmth. Leona Baumgartner, whom I have mentioned, said 'You do realise that he loves you?' I thought it was a funny word for my father to use but I think, in fact, in his way, that was the case. When I had been married - I met my wife in the States, she is English - he came over and we spent a night in New York with him⁴. He took us to *My Fair Lady*. It was a marvellous experience because he was totally relaxed and enjoyed meeting my wife Susan. It was as if he was not the famous man that everybody knows him as. He was then being a father. It was a bit late, but he obviously had it deep down inside him.

MB I'm trying to search into that relationship because what I'm getting Charles is a feeling that there was a basis for close affection and many occasions when you laughed together and shared humour; many family memories that you really delight in because you light up in that recall, but that in a way you didn't get to know this man who really deep inside was not available to his family to some extent?

CF I think it was the lack of physical contact. There was never any physical contact. In our own families, my sister's and mine, there is a lot of physical contact and this may be the reaction to what we didn't have with my father. There was plenty with mother.

MB But he stood off?

CF He stood off. Without involvement it's hard to be emotionally attached. You can admire but not be quite so close.

MB Just concluding what I was thinking, I was just feeling that from time to time something gave, there was a valve and something reached out to you, and they were the luxury moments in that relationship that made it, looking back on it, quite close, but for much of the time it was held at quite a distance.

CF Yes.

MB You did tell me of an opportunity missed to see him. I think you felt that you missed a last opportunity to see him.

CF I didn't realise it was the last opportunity at the time. I was living in the States and on holiday in the UK when I went to see my father. We had a good time and I spent a day and a half in Oxford, then I went travelling and seeing friends. He asked me to come and see him again on my way out of the country.

⁴ Howard Florey did not meet Charles Florey's wife at the wedding, as stated in the videotaped interview, but some months afterwards.

MB He pressed that on you?

CF He didn't press it. He suggested it on the phone. I said, 'I can't manage it,' and that was the last time I might have seen him because he died not long after. So I felt sad about that, but in the long run life is like that. You make decisions which you may regret later but there's nothing you can do about them afterwards.

MB One of the things that you've said that would be nice to have your reflections on was that he was never actually a famous person to you, he was somebody you saw with a range of failures and dimensions, but certainly not as a famous person.

CF That's right. I learnt about my father by reading the books and clearly the books came out after he had left us. It's been very interesting learning more about him through the books.

MB Voyages of discovery really.

CF And relating that to what I knew, which were the family circumstances and what was going on there while other things were going on outside of which I was unaware. It's almost like reading about somebody else, not one's father. I remember him as a father and not a great man of science, though I appreciate that he was the latter.

MB When we talked a little while ago you were talking about the strength of not only his science but the fact that he could get deeply into leisure interests and that he could have passions that were really quite strong. Can we just go down that avenue for a moment?

CF One of the things that he really enjoyed was taking photographs. He took a lot of stills and he took 16mm movies. It's very difficult to get to see them now because 16mm projectors are hard to come by.

MB These are with the family still?

CF Some of them. Some of them have been archived, in fact, because they were about his trips during the war. He had a Leica camera which I received after his death. I'll just show it to you. It's quite old. It's date is something like 1934, which is my birth date, so maybe he celebrated by buying this for himself. It's a lovely camera. It needs cleaning. You can see it on some of the photographs of him.

MB And with this he took the thousands and thousands of pictures that you now have in the family.

CF Yes. I don't think he ever had another camera after he bought that.

MB And he also painted.

CF Yes, he took his painting more seriously after he had 'retired'⁵. He thought that he'd like to sit and contemplate a scene rather than just take a photograph. So he did a lot of landscapes and certainly some of them were excellent. He also did portraits of the family, which are less than excellent.

MB Is there one of you in that collection somewhere, Charles?

CF Yes, I've got it and shall not show it to you! I think I've got all of them, in fact, because nobody wants them. He did quite a good one of himself. His technique was interesting because it was still a photographic one. He took photographs of us all and projected the photographs on to the canvas and then painted. That may be the reason why it wasn't altogether successful.

MB They were too lifelike!

CF Yes. My sister told me that in fact he did quite a number of his landscape paintings in this way. He took a photograph first to see what it looked like in two dimensions.

MB And then worked from that basis.

CF Yes. Nevertheless, we have a number of pictures that are really very good. I could see that his technique was really quite competent.

MB We've talked over these leisure interests and the pressures and the family. What of the personal recollections? We've had a number of them already but are there any personal recollections that don't actually relate to any particular theme, things that just happened? I was just wondering if he ever tried to take you into a laboratory and say, 'look down here, this is rather exciting, this is my particular, look at whatever'? Did he try to interest you in what he did?

CF Yes. He took me into the lab on a number of occasions and we looked down a microscope. It actually never fascinated me. I think it may have been because I didn't think I would ever achieve his position in a laboratory. It just wasn't what I wanted to do.

MB Was there a feeling that it was so great that this was not an area to travel? Does that come out from that comment?

CF No. There wasn't a conscious feeling that I needed to find something different to do. I wasn't interested in looking down microscopes, basically. However, he did do something very helpful for me when I was approaching finals at university. He felt, probably rightly, that I didn't know quite enough pathology to get through the exam. So we played something akin to the old games at the dining table; we went through all the things that were likely to turn up in the exam. He told me what I needed to know and then the following day I told him back. That worked extremely

⁵ In the videotaped interview it is implied that Howard Florey took up painting after he had retired. In fact, he started painting well before his retirement.

well. In fact, he was an excellent teacher. Maybe I was just receptive because it was him. I got all the questions that I was expecting in the exam.

MB Again this is another example of, in a way, without this closeness, that he was looking out for you

CF Yes, there's no doubt about that.

MB Behind the scenes, he was looking out for you?

CF Yes. That exercise was particularly successful. He was very concerned that I didn't have enough interest in medicine to get through my exams. He wanted me to go and work in a lab, not with him but with somebody else, in preparation for the physiology exams. I heard later that he said that if I hadn't done this extra work he would have given me up. It hadn't occurred to me that he would even contemplate doing that. But it ended happily. It was wise of him to have pushed me to do this revision, but I didn't become a physiologist either.

MB There was an element of privilege and preparation in all that.

CF Yes.

MB Thinking of privilege as well, he worked with many of the great minds in science at the time. Did they come to your home? Was it a centre of meeting for scientists?

CF No. Apart from when I was very young, and wouldn't have been involved. I remember there were various people who came who were involved with the clinical application of penicillin, but usually the scientists who did visit were entertained in college. Our home wasn't designed for entertainment, to be quite honest.

MB You mean by the time you were old enough to really get abreast of whether people came or not, it had become bleak?

CF Yes. I don't think people really looked forward to coming, so it didn't happen. We didn't have dinner parties, if that's what you are driving at. We had occasional teas for people. I remember Jim Gowans coming to a tea when he was a young man, but that was the last tea I think that we had.

MB Just taking the whole story in and winding down now, have we missed anything that's really in your mind about father at this stage? He's been dead for thirty years now. I'm just wondering whether distilling out of those years you have actually thought about his temperament, his personality, what he gave to science or whether you've just left it that other people and biographers have judged him? I wonder what your judgement is. I've got a feel for your relationship with him, but how do you appraise what he achieved and the kind of man he was?

CF I think that's extremely difficult. As a child one is always in competition with one's parents, and so you think what are his failures rather than what everybody knows are his successes. He had very few failures and we've essentially discussed

those. They were in any case not failures the outside world tended to see, particularly once the penicillin story started to unfold. They were failures such as when he was at Cambridge University when he played tennis to win and not for the game, that sort of approach. And he was extremely blunt with other people. I think he played science to win and was very single-minded about what he did. But he did create a team, so it wasn't just a personal ambition, he created a team that was extremely successful and continued to be so in the laboratory afterwards.

I have a second appreciation of him, one of a threat to autonomy. I suppose there are people who will say: 'Well, of course, with a famous father, doors open for you.' There's no doubt that some doors have opened. The fact that I went back to the States, that was a door that certainly was helped by my father. But maybe the choice of epidemiology was subconsciously made because it was an area where the doors wouldn't open so readily and I could try and deal with it with my own ability rather than his.

MB From my own point of view, looking back with hindsight and all the things that I've heard and gleaned about Howard Florey over the years, there is a major story of course in the story of penicillin, in the relationship between himself and Fleming. Is that something he had strong thoughts about because he was certainly denied a lot of the credit in the early years?

CF Yes. He did not like Fleming at all. The story of my father not speaking to the Press, I think, is well-known and, in many ways, it was as much my father's fault that he was denied credit as Fleming taking advantage of the situation.

MB You mean, he took a big stance of 'I won't talk to the Press'? It was a busy time.

CF No, he just wouldn't speak to the Press. He felt that the Press would distort the facts and they would get the wrong idea or they would make a fool of him. It has rubbed off on me certainly. I always worry about that sort of thing, but he worried about it intensely. If he had been a different sort of person, then I'm sure that the Oxford lab would have been much more quickly recognised for what it did.

MB This antagonism towards Fleming, that was really genuine? I mean, they didn't like each other?

CF That was genuine. I don't know what they felt early on, but again I don't know directly, it's from the books.

MB Your father didn't speak to you about this particular issue?

CF No, he may have spoken to my sister but not to me. It certainly was that Fleming appeared to take more credit for work that other people had done than seemed reasonable.

MB In one of my concluding thoughts today, Charles, I just want to reflect on what people have said about your father's transition from being Provost of Queen's College in Oxford and then becoming President of the Royal Society. People have said that he

became a warm, fatherly figure in those years, having been rather stern. Is that anything that you recognise? You talked to me earlier on today about all of a sudden he became interested in international populations. Was there a change in the later years?

CF Well, he was getting older. He was more tolerant, as most people become, though I wouldn't ever have thought of him in that way. You may have got that from some people in the College. Again, on this tape I have he was talking about the people in College, not as individuals but as a group, and he said, 'I go to these intolerable College meetings just to keep the thing rolling along.' I think that may have given this impression of being a very tolerant fatherly figure, but at the same time he was bringing in lots of money to create all sorts of new building for the College.

MB I'm going to wind down in a moment, Charles, because we've taken you through a range of memories of father, but before I do, I'm going to give you the worst question of all: is there one abiding memory that lights up from all the years, is there an abiding memory that we have to conclude on?

CF That's a very difficult question. Did I tell you of one in previous times?

MB No. That's why I'm still fishing.

CF I would have to think about that. I think I have unburdened myself, in fact. An abiding memory of my father? Well, if you like, one. It actually turned up in one of the BBC programmes, and that was a photograph of me being held upside down in the Fulton's garden and being shaken like this by my father. I think that really is an abiding memory because people reminded me that they had seen it.

MB What was the occasion? Why were you being shaken?

CF He was on one of his visits. I suppose it was personal contact!

MB One last contact is your photographs of father and mother that I wouldn't like to escape us.

CF These two.

MB Yes.

CF The one of my mother shows that she has obviously got a hearing aid. They were quite large devices at that time, and it dominated her life. She had become deaf with otosclerosis in her twenties. She was remarkable in being very nearly totally deaf but still managing to cope with everyday life. She had an operation which was supposed to relieve the deafness but in fact only made her dizzy. She was dizzy for some time after that, for a year or more. She ended up with this, as it was then, very modern device. I think her deafness was probably one of the reasons why there was friction between my parents. When you talked to her she often missed what you said or misunderstood and gave you a strange answer. That my father found difficult to deal with. We all did.

MB He was used to fairly quick straight answers?

CF Well, it was repartee much of the time in the family, so as she got deafer it got more difficult.

MB This is a wonderful portrait of Howard Florey.

CF Yes. I like it because it's the way I remember him.

MB This was in Queen's College?

CF No, this was in Marston.

MB He'd gone to live in Marston in the late...

CF Fifties, yes. And I suppose that was late fifties or early sixties.

MB He looks wonderfully relaxed.

CF He had a chair that Daniel McMichael⁶ now has, which he always lay back in. That's what he was doing there. I told him that I wanted to take this picture so that I would have something to remember him by when I went back to the States.

MB A delightful portrait. Charles, on that note, that last look at Howard Florey, thank-you very much for talking to me about your father.

CF You are very welcome.

Professor Charles Florey's help in the editing of the transcript is gratefully acknowledged.

⁶ Daniel McMichael is the son of Paquita McMichael, Charles Florey's sister.